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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, EAP/BCLTV, OES; PACOM FOR FPA HUSO, OSD  
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SUBJECT: PACOM ADM FARGO'S MEETING WITH THAI FM SURAKIART,  
JANUARY 19, 2005

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce. Reason: 1.4 (b, d)

11. (C) Summary: In their January 19 meeting, FM Surakiart told ADM Fargo that the U.S. had "won the hearts of Asians" with its rapid and massive relief to Thailand and other tsunami-devastated countries. He expressed pride in the

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Royal Thai Government's (RTG) contribution of quick approval for use of Utapao as a regional hub for assistance. Surakiart highlighted that Thailand will host a conference January 28-29 on a regional tsunami early warning system (EWS) and pressed for ministerial level attendance. ADM Fargo discussed his views on the state of U.S. efforts in Sri Lanka and Indonesia. He indicated that the U.S. would wind down its military relief operations in Thailand and Sri Lanka in a few weeks, but would keep the Combined Support Force headquarters until U.S. military efforts in Indonesia were complete. End Summary.

12. (SBU) On January 19, Foreign Minister (FM) Surakiart Sathirathai warmly welcomed U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) Commander Admiral Thomas Fargo and thanked him for United States' assistance to Thailand and other nations in the region after the tsunami. ADM Fargo said he regretted visiting under such difficult circumstances and expressed his heartfelt sympathies to the Thai people over their significant losses. He reported that in every disaster-struck country he had visited in the region he had observed a pattern of people working together on recovery.

STRONG THAI PITCH ON JANUARY 28-29 EWS MINISTERIAL IN PHUKET

13. (SBU) FM Surakiart agreed and said that the efficient and prompt assistance rendered by the U.S. had "won the hearts of Asians." He underscored that Prime Minister (PM) Thaksin had approved the U.S. request to use Utapao as a regional hub less than a day after being asked, and pledged that Thailand would continue to work closely with the U.S. Surakiart then added that the response is entering into a reconstruction/rehabilitation phase in which the United Nations and non-governmental organizations (NGO) would play a greater role in working with governments. He said that, in order to maintain momentum on a regional tsunami emergency system (EWS) after the World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) in Kobe, Thailand will host an EWS meeting January 28-29 in Phuket. Forty countries, including the U.S., were being invited to send minister-led teams. FM Surakiart asked who might lead the U.S. delegation.

14. (SBU) ADM Fargo said he was not familiar with the Thai-hosted EWS ministerial, but was sure that the U.S. would be supportive. He said that if NOAA Administrator Dr. Conrad Lautenbacher, a retired Navy Vice Admiral, were available, he was very knowledgeable about EWS and would have answers to contribute. FM Surakiart said NOAA participation is very welcome, but stressed the importance of political support. PM Thaksin and visiting Nordic Prime Ministers had agreed on this point and Thailand was inviting foreign ministers. After exploring whether Dr. Condoleezza Rice had yet been confirmed as Secretary of State, Surakiart suggested that perhaps Robert Zoellick, former U.S. Trade Representative, might attend for the U.S. "in his new hat" (Deputy Secretary of State-designate). Ambassador Boyce said it was difficult to say who would be available but we would seek to ensure that a high-quality U.S. delegation attends.

KEY ROLE OF UTAPAO

15. (SBU) ADM Fargo agreed with Surakiart's assessment that Thailand's immediate approval of Utapao for a regional hub was critical to the rapid U.S. relief response. There was no delay in providing U.S. assistance to Thailand and also to Sri Lanka and Indonesia. U.S. Naval ships were dispatched the day after the tsunami struck, but the C-130s operating out of Utapao were faster to arrive in the region. Surakiart commented that Secretary Powell was the first foreign minister to call and offer Thailand assistance. ADM Fargo said that the U.S. humanitarian response was probably the fastest he had seen in his career and had proceeded very well.

#### ASSISTANCE FOR SRI LANKA AND INDONESIA

16. (C) FM Surakiart asked for an assessment of the situation and current relief effort in Sri Lanka and Indonesia. ADM Fargo said Sri Lanka had lost over 40 thousand people, but was now past the emergency response stage, with no additional loss of life, and had entered into rehabilitation/reconstruction. India, among other countries, was continuing to provide help. Surakiart interjected that Thailand had contributed token relief funds to Sri Lanka and Indonesia. ADM Fargo said that the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) allowed, and in some cases controlled distribution of relief in Sri Lanka's northeastern provinces, also hit hard by the tsunami. He said that he had spoken with the President of Sri Lanka and discussed phasing out U.S. military efforts by the end of January.

17. (C) Indonesia is a different matter, ADM Fargo said. The west coast of Aceh and the city of Banda Aceh were devastated. There are vast stretches with no trees or houses left standing. Whole villages are gone, with only a few concrete building foundations remaining. The flood waters had receded, but the salt sea water had rendered fields unusable for agriculture. Major roads were wiped out, with sections of the shoreline swept away. However, the airport at Banda Aceh is fully functional and the U.S. and others continue to deliver relief supplies. ADM Fargo said that the Indonesia government had indicated its sense that Aceh would be in the reconstruction stage by the end of March. In fact, the U.S. military expected to end its emergency relief role in Indonesia well before that, perhaps by mid-February, when the UN and the aid "professionals" would take over.

18. (C) Surakiart asked about political conflict in Aceh and problems with the rebels. ADM Fargo said that was an important point, but the rebels had not threatened the relief effort. He noted that a USD 5 billion -- maybe higher -- reconstruction effort over several years was needed and this might provide an opportunity for the Aceh conflict to move towards resolution. Surakiart said he hoped that would result and added that Thailand had spoken at the Jakarta ASEAN Summit of the need to deflect aid to countries that needed it most.

#### THAILAND WELCOMES TECHNICAL, PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE ASSISTANCE

19. (SBU) For its part, Surakiart repeated, Thailand would continue to push for a regional EWS to be implemented and was occupied with reconstruction, and rehabilitation of damaged natural resources, such as coral reefs. Dr. Yongyuth Mayalarb, Advisor to the FM, chimed in that Thailand welcomes technical assistance and advice on such rehabilitation projects, but does not want international funding from governments to go through the RTG. International assistance could go directly to local people or to them through NGOs. Surakiart said that there was already an excess of immediate relief supplies and offers from everywhere. Thailand, he said, hoped for real people-to-people efforts. A donor, for example, might rebuild a local school and provide uniforms and replacement books.

110. (SBU) ADM Fargo said reconstruction was still a complex task to organize and would need to be synchronized in some fashion. Surakiart said that Deputy Prime Minister Suwat Liptapanlop was in charge of ensuring that international assistance is sent to the devastated areas and coordinating with local authorities to see what they need. The RTG would do all infrastructure replacement, he said, and some relocation elsewhere might be necessary in some cases. ADM Fargo said that in Indonesia records had been wiped out and sometimes it was not even known who owned plots of land, which is why he was interested in how Thailand approached comprehensive planning for reconstruction.

#### COBRA GOLD; TIMETABLE FOR CONTINUING OPERATIONS AT UTAPAO

111. (SBU) ADM Fargo highlighted that Cobra Gold had been important to the U.S. ability to respond quickly and to adopt a multilateral approach. The habits of cooperation developed in Cobra Gold had been invaluable. This year, he said, Cobra Gold might be smaller, but humanitarian civic actions that were originally part of the exercise would be relocated to the areas hardest hit by the tsunami. The Combined Support Group-Thailand (CSG-T) was winding down its work in Phuket very shortly, except for forensics experts who would be available for as long as Thailand needs them. ADM Fargo said Indonesia operations would continue to about mid-February, and that military relief headquarters at Utapao would probably redeploy by the end of February. FM Surakiart responded that the RTG would support this timetable.

#### TRANSITION TO UN COORDINATION

112. (SBU) Surakiart said that at the Jakarta ASEAN meeting, there had been discussion of how much had been learned regarding how the UN can work with military forces to respond to disaster. In Thailand, it had been clear that there was

no alternative, and there had been no question about U.S. use of Utapao. But the UN had a standby arrangement and coordinating role. ADM Fargo said that one reason the operation at Utapao was called a "combined support force" was that it was not exclusively military. The UN and NGOs and military had worked confidently together in an unprecedented way. FM Surakiart agreed. He said that only the U.S. could have pulled together this effort, and everyone knew that the U.S. military was at Utapao to help.

13. (U) Participants: In addition to FM Surakiart, the Thai MFA team included his advisor Dr. Yongyuth Mayalarb, Deputy Permanent Secretary Pisan Manawapat, East Asia Director General (DG) Nopadol Gunavibool, Americas and South Pacific DG Nongnuth Phetcharatana, Ambassador Lieutenant Commander Itti Ditbanjong, and several notetakers. The U.S. side consisted of ADM Thomas Fargo, Ambassador Ralph Boyce, PACOM Foreign Policy Advisor Ravic Huso, several members of ADM Fargo's staff and an Embassy notetaker.  
BOYCE